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# HOW TO WRITE PHOTOPLAYS





# **HOW TO WRITE PHOTOPLAYS**

**BY CARL CHARLTON**

**CHIEF SCENARIO WRITER OF THE CROWN FILM  
MANUFACTURING CO.**

**A THOROUGHLY PRACTICAL GUIDE TO PHOTOPLAY  
WRITING. FULL EXPLANATION OF TECHNICAL  
TERMS, NEW IDEAS, PLOTS AND ACTION  
SCENERY SYNOPSIS AND ONE COM-  
PLETE SCENARIO.**

**HOW TO DISPOSE OF YOUR SCENARIO TO THE GREAT  
EST ADVANTAGE. A THOROUGHLY  
COMPLETE GUIDE TO PHOTOPLAY  
WRITING  
AND ACTING.**

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## HOW TO WRITE MOVING PICTURE PLAYS.

### CHAPTER I

#### THE REQUIREMENTS FOR "MOVIE" ACTORS.

With the development and mushroom-like growth in popularity of the "moving picture" there has been a new field opened for actors. Scores of film corporations have been formed throughout the country and each corporation has from three to five, or more, companies of actors working for it.

The legitimate stage has been scoured for men and women by the photoplay producers—and still the supply is inadequate—though, of course, the directors are besieged by thousands of people who think they could be "movie" stars if they were given the opportunity.

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Naturally, the man or woman who has been trained to act on the legitimate stage furnishes better material for the directors of the photoplay than the person who has had no such training. He knows how to carry himself, how to make his entrance "without falling over his feet" and has a stage presence.

But stage training is not an absolute necessity in "movie" acting success—for the reason that for photoplays all acting is in pantomime. Many an actor or actress has failed of success on the legitimate stage for the reason that he has not been able to enunciate clearly, or because he mouthed his words or could not be broken of his desire to rant.

In "movie" acting no such unforgivable faults would handicap the actor because he is not obliged to speak. He must simply act—and act in pantomime. The stage of the legitimate drama has been supplanted by the studio of the photoplay.

Instead of the wide expanse of theatre, there is the small room set just for the scene—and the ever present high-powdered lights radiated by the violet rays and the clicking camera. As a usual thing, there are only a few spectators present—a few of the actors and actresses waiting for the setting of their scenes, an occasional visitor, and the director.

Now the director is the man who is to the photo-play what the stage manager is to the theatre. Armed with a copy of the scenario—moving picture manuscripts are called scenarios—he stands out of range of camera and tells the actors and actresses what to do.

There are no elaborate rehearsals, no long drills in saying the lines in order to get the proper emphasis to bring out the salient points of the part. When the scene is set, the director calls his actors and actresses.

Taking the scenario, he reads the special things they are to do to them. Then comes a sharp question "Understand?" Many of the actors do not, he says so, and the director re-reads the action or explains it.

Again comes the "Understand?" This time the answer is a chorused, "yes."

"All right, then we'll try it," from the director and the actors and actresses take their places. The director then tells each one what to do. And the scene is enacted.

A wait of a few minutes follows and then the action is again rehearsed.

Three times, possibly more, the action is gone through, the director—and even the actors—making suggestions until the scene is satisfactory .



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Again comes a brief respite, then the director calls, "Ready?"

Comes the chorused "yes" from the actors.

"All right, Camera!" from the director—and the machine begins to click as the operator turns the crank.

All the time, however, the director is telling the actors and actresses what to do.

When the scene has been run through, the director cries "End," and the camera stops clicking.

Another respite is allowed, and then the action is again repeated with the camera clicking, for the best film companies make two, sometimes more, films of each scene.

"Next scene," calls the director and actors and actresses again get in focus.

If a different stage setting is required for the ensuing scene, this has been set up in another part of the studio and the actors go to it. For time is precious in making photoplays.

And that is all there is to the "filming" of a moving picture. No weeks' of rehearsal, no memorizing of parts.

Is it any wonder that actors and actresses are deserting the legitimate stage and crowding to the doors of the studios, eagerly seeking engagements?

Yet, there is not a man or woman among the thousands of "movie" actors who has "trodden the boards," who will not tell you that he misses the sea of faces represented by the audience, the murmurs of appreciation, the laughs, and ahs! and ohs! at the climaxes—and above all the applause.

Said one of the most famous actors of present day stars, who has deserted the legitimate stage for the studio, after his first day's experience: "It is heart-breaking not to be able to see the people to whom you are playing. Of course, millions will see me in the films made today, but I did not see one of their faces. There was no appreciation of my acting, just the everlasting click, click, click of the camera. I tell you, it is worth all the money they give us to forego the personal relation between actor and audience and play to a camera."

## CHAPTER II.

### HINTS TO "MOVIE" ACTORS.

Thus, while the acting for photoplays has its advantages, it also has its drawbacks.

Every large producing corporation has one or more studios throughout the country.

Lately, California has been the Mecca of photoplay producers. Cities, rivalling the mushroom-like growth of the old mining boom towns, have been erected and millions of dollars invested in the "movie" plants.

Other locations that have found favor are Arizona and Florida and, of course, Philadelphia, New York and Chicago stand out as the cities where studios abound.

Each studio has several directors, actors who have won fame in various phases of the drama, tragedy, melodrama, comedy and farce. .

Under each director is a company with a leading man and woman and the supporting cast.

As a usual thing, the regular companies do not number more than ten or a dozen on their roster, the other characters being drawn as occasion requires from the "supes."

And being a "supe" at a "movie" studio is a soul-trying job.

Compelled to report at a certain hour, in case they may be needed, the "supes" come and hang 'round, men and women, youths and girls, some with stage experience, more without—waiting for the "call" which will mean five dollars to them. For if "supes" work, they receive five dollars a day—if they do not, they have the pleasure of passing the day at the studio.

Directors, however, are not stony-hearted orges, and they usually so arrange that the "supes" will have three or four days' work a week.

Of course, if the films being produced require many people, their earnings are higher and more steady.

It is into the "supes" that the aspirant for "movie" honors will first be placed. If he shows any ability,

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he will soon be taken on to a company, for directors are always on the lookout for new actors, and are ever ready to bring forward a new potential star.

One piece of advice can be given the "movie" "supe" that should always be borne in mind—Be willing and ready to do what you are told—regardless of all else.

How essential this willingness is, the following story will illustrate:

In one of the California studios there was a very promising young fellow who, in addition to ability as an actor, was very good looking.

He had been taken from the rank of the "supes" and cast in minor parts.

One day, the character he was to play was supposed to wear a beard.

All was ready for the scene when the director happened to notice that this young actor was without the beard.

"Brown," he shouted, "where is that beard I told you to wear?"

"Now, Mr. White," answered the youth, "I don't think I ought to be asked to wear a beard. The public has come to recognize my face and they wouldn't know me if I wore—"

"Will you get that beard?" interrupted the director.

"Look here, Mr. White—"

But that was as far as young Brown got.

Moving to a "supe," the director shouted:

"Hopkins, you get a beard and play this part. Brown, you get out—and stay out."

Hopkins played the part, Brown was discharged from the company—and now he has difficulty in getting work as a "supe," even in the other companies.

Moral: In a "movie" studio do what you are told.

Indeed, it is versatility and an absolute disregard for personal appearance that are the two essentials for the person who would succeed as a photoplay actor.

The "beauty" parts are already pre-empted by high salaried stars—success lies in making a hit in some particular part. And it is as likely to come in some outlandish make-up as in an evening gown.

No one, for instance, would choose Charlie Chaplin's make-up from preference, or do all the stunts Marie Dressler does as Tessie—yet Chaplin's make-up and Dressler's willingness earn them enormous salaries.

The director, however, is not the only one upon which the responsibility for the success of a photo-

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play film depends—the man who turns the crank of the camera plays a very important part.

While the director is rehearsing his scene, the man at the camera looks through his perspective glass and makes sure that all the stage settings, the actors and their actions are within the focus of his lens.

If they are not, he tells them, and rearranges their stations and range of action until they are.

Also, he is judge of the lighting effects and of the make-up of the actors and actresses.

What has been said about making up for various characters on the legitimate stage applies to the make-up of "movie" actors, with these exceptions:

More rouge must be used for the high artificial light of the studios tends to give the face a pallor.

Lines and wrinkles must not be so heavily drawn.

The aspirant for "movie" honors can assist himself materially by acting in front of a mirror, going through the part of some play or "movie" he has seen, walking to and fro until his actions and carriage become natural and unaffected.

Self-confidence is, of course, as necessary for the photoplay actor as for the legitimate, but the prime requisites are willingness to do what you are told—or to dress as you are told—and versatility,

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If you have these plus determination and a nature that can withstand trials and disappointments, there is no reason why you should not succeed as a photoplay actor.

### THE REQUISITES OF A PHOTO-PLAYWRIGHT.

#### HOW TO WRITE MOVING PICTURE PLAYS.

With the advent of the moving pictures a new field in play-wrighting was opened up—and one in which there is an ever increasing demand.

No long course of training is necessary to write a photoplay, no knowledge of stage technique, no necessity for cudgelling one's brains for clever lines or witty jokes.

Just two things are necessary for a "movie" play—originality of plot and action.

The action, however, must be such that it can be grasped by mind and will tell the story without recourse to words.

At first thought this may seem easy. But it is not.

There are countless situations and actions that would be thrilling, tragic, or funny, as the case may be, if the actors would speak. As they cannot, or rather as the spectators cannot hear them, the situation or action is unsuitable for the photoplay.

As has been said, the writing of "movies" does not require long training, though, of course, experience is



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valuable, and proof of this is found in the fact that men and women who have written successful plays that have been produced upon the legitimate stage find it over difficult to write photoplays—despite their training—because they have been accustomed to make their characters talk to tell the story, instead of telling it by their actions.

Now, a successful “movie” depends upon the *idea*—and a clever, thrilling or funny idea is as likely to emanate from the brain of a man “in the ditches,” who cannot spell correctly, as it is in the mind of a college professor.

So if you have the inclination to write photoplays, do not let the fact that you are lacking in education or training deter you.

If the *idea* is there—and the story can be told by acting—the play will be accepted.

Indeed, there is a dearth of good “movies” and scenario editors—because the men and women who have proved they can write successful photoplays are up to their ears in orders—are forced to turn to books and magazine stories, even to old plays, in their efforts to provide new films.

The vogue for the stories of books, plays and magazines, however, is passing.

The public is clamoring for something *new*—and

the scenario editors are turning heaven and earth to give it to them.

So, as has been said, if you have an idea, write it out and send it to some film concern, and you may lay the foundation of fame and fortune.

There are, of course, certain hints that will help, and some will be given.

### CHAPTER III.

#### HOW THE PHOTO-PLAY IS MADE.

First of all, it may be well to give an idea of a photo-play studio.

The most important thing in the making of moving pictures is light. Therefore, the studio is usually so constructed that it receives all the natural light possible, which is augmented by the use of the high-powered artificial lights of all sorts and descriptions. Calcium lights, violet rays and super violet rays are used, and the electrical equipment requires the services of a corps of experts.

The studio, which, of course, varies in different photo-play plants, is usually divided into four or five large rooms, so that while a film is being made in one, the others can be prepared for the next scenes in the photo-play, because the "movies" are cameraed scene by scene.

Because of this, time becomes a thing of greatest value, so that everything possible is done to prevent the waste of any.

Often while a film is being made, scene painters are at work in other parts of the room, out of the range of the camera, of course, for while for the most part, and wherever possible, the outdoor scenes are taken from real houses, actual streets and amid natural surroundings, many must, of necessity, be painted especially.

As in the regular theatre, there is a property room—and the properties are of a wide and varied assortment.

In the wardrobe room are kept all sorts of costumes because the demands of the different parts as regards costumes in photo-plays are almost without limit.

The form of the studio varies according to the location. In the country, where there is plenty of room, the buildings cover several acres, and are but a story in height. On the other hand, in cities such as New York, where land is very expensive, they are to be found on the spacious floors of some of the big loft buildings.

The plants for developing and printing the films are separate from the studio building proper because of

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the danger from which, as the material used in the films is highly inflammable.

As has been said in the first part of the book, the man in charge of a scenario production is called the director, but his duties do not consist solely in directing his actors and actresses before the camera. His life would be a comparatively easy one if they did.

In reality they are multifold.

As soon as a scenario has been completed and its immediate production decided upon, the particular director in whose forte it lies, that is, the director for tragedy, melodrama, farce or adventure and Wild West—as the case may be—is given the manuscript.

He reads it over, then studies the scenes. He makes mental note of them and then starts out to find actual scenes that can be used.

Indeed, every house, every mountain, every street, in short, every outdoor scene that is flashed upon the "movie" screen has been selected from among many for some particular twist in the scenario, with the same care that one would use in choosing a diamond.

For instance, if the scenario calls for country estate, the one actually filmed is not chosen until every country estate—where permission can be obtained—in the region has been inspected. And so it is with every

house-front scene, every store, every street crossing, and all the rest which figure in the films.

Obviously this task was not easy, and took up a great deal of time, for the old method was for the director to jump into his automobile and race about the city or country until he found just the setting he wanted.

Nowadays, however, the biggest film concerns have a "location" director, and he devotes his time to searching out settings—and arranging for permission to use them if they are on private property—exclusively.

One of the California corporations, however, has adopted a system that will probably be taken up by all other companies.

This system consists of a card index, which lists every location within a day's run of Los Angeles, where the studio is situated.

Let us take, for instance, houses.

First, they are divided into groups of wealthy, middle class, workmen's, Chinamen's, and shacks.

The location of each is fully described and a photograph is attached to the index card.

Similarly, mountains, rivers, streets, etc., are indexed.

Thus, instead of racing about, the director simply goes to the index and the expert in charge, after hear-

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ing the description of the location wanted, gives him several cards from which he can make his choice.

Wealthy people are usually the most opposed to allowing their places to be the setting for films, whereas there are scores of the middle and lower classes who are most eager to have not only their places, but themselves filmed.

When the location has been selected, the director takes his actors, actresses and camera men to the spot and the scene is enacted.

Many of the stars object to driving about in daylight in their costumes and make-up, and so the majority of them have cabriolets which contain all the clothes they will need and their make-up, and in these they drive about, using them as dressing rooms when arrived at the locality selected.

So in planning your scene, bear in mind the difficulties of the "location" director—and do not call for the impossible.

In addition to the "location" director, the biggest and best of the film concerns now have "cast" directors.

It is the duty of the "cast" director to assign the parts, except, of course, the leads, for every picture produced by his company.

Like the stage manager of the theatre, he must be an expert judge of human nature.

Upon him devolves the task of "looking over" the "supes" and the applicants—numbering from ten to a hundred, usually, according to the location of the studio—who come to him seeking work.

Usually, he tells at a glance whether or not he can use the applicant. If he says he can, he will—if he says he can't it is a waste of breath to argue with or importune him.

Naturally he comes to know hundreds of actors and, knowing them, he can readily select the one he wants for the part of an erring wife, the ingenue, whose face will make up to bring laughter or tears, or who will present the appearance of the most daredevil cowboy or desperate murderer.

Like the stage manager, his word is law.



### CHAPTER III.

#### PHOTOPLAY TERMS.

There are certain technical terms which must be understood by the writer of "movie" scenarios.

A *Leader* is the title given to an announcement of the lapse of time, or words that are essential to the play, and must be filmed for the spectator to understand the action, as the actor cannot speak.

A *Fadeaway* or a *Vision* is the shadowy production of some action that has already passed, which the actor either must recall or wishes to recall.

A *Cut-in* is similar to a *Leader*, and is used when letters or words are to be produced.

A *Flash* is the enlargement of anything that is of importance in the action of the story, for instance, if the actor looks at his watch and starts as he sees the

time, or stops at a door and looks at the number, or picks up a blood-stained knife, the scenario would read—Flash watch, number, knife, as the case might be.

*Getting across* anything means that the actor makes the other or others in the scene understand what he means. For example, take a football scene. The captain of one team that is being beaten realizes that one man on the opposing team is responsible for his team's poor showing. He beckons his men about him, nods in the direction of that certain player, and *gets across* to his team-mates that they are to put the other player out of commission.

*Registering* an emotion is exposing it. For instance, registering surprise.

A *Cut-back* is the return to an actor in a former scene after the action of the story has progressed.

Inasmuch as leaders and cut-ins use up film a foot to a word, they should be resorted to only when absolutely necessary. For the producer has sufficient expense in his company and plant, without adding to it in film for cut-ins and leaders.

With this explanation of terms most commonly used, the form of the scenario can now be taken up.

Brevity is the great desideration—for the scenario editor has many manuscripts to read, and is an expert

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in his line, so that he can grasp a story or scenario readily.

It seems almost needless to say that scenarios should be written on only one side of the paper, but so many are received that are written on both that it is deemed advisable.

If possible, the manuscript should be typewritten, as it will receive quicker attention than a "script" written in long hand.

Paper  $8\frac{1}{4}$  by 11 inches—or some similar size—should be used when obtainable.

On the first sheet write only the name of the play and the author.

On the second, write the list of characters and the number of scenes, divided into exteriors and interiors.

On the third sheet, write the word *Synopsis*, and then give an outline of the story in as few words as possible.

On the fourth sheet, write *Synopsis of Scenes*, and then number and list every scene.

On the fifth sheet again write the name of the play and the name of the author at the top of the page and start in on the body of your scenario.

If using a typewriter it will improve the appearance of your manuscript—and also your chances of having

it accepted—if you use a two-colored ribbon, red and black, red and blue, or red and purple.

The *Scene*, the *name of the character*, all *stage directions*, the words *Leader*, *Cut-in*, *Cut-back*, *Fadeaway* or *Vision* and *Flash* should be written in red, the description of the action in black, blue or purple.

At the end of the scenario write the words, "The End."

The manuscripts should at least be held together by clips.

When one is located where he can obtain them, heavy manila paper folders should be used, with rings, the manuscript pages punched and then put up the rings. This gives a ship-shape appearance to the scenario, and is sure to make a good impression.

Indeed, to enhance this "good impression" upon receipt, many "movie" writers use leather books, with name of play and author printed on them. This, of course, entails expense, and is not necessary.

Under no conditions roll a manuscript when sending it to a scenario editor. It is even better not to fold it, but to send it flat.

Always enclose stamps for the return of the manuscript.

In your synopsis, in your scenario, in your letter

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to the editor be brief. The editor is a busy man, and will appreciate consideration.

Recently the following extract from a scenario was published as an example of this brevity so much desired by editors:

Scene 1—Poor room.

Mother working—sewing. Boy in, demands money. Mother refuses. Boy angry. Mother counts out few coins. Boy hurries off.

Scene 2—Street.

Boy on and off.

Scene 3—Room. Mother sewing.

Scene 4—Saloon, exterior. Boy on and in.

Scene 5—Saloon, interior. Boy in, drinks, etc., with boys at table.

Scene 6—As in 4. Well dressed man, drunk on, rambles in.

Scene 7—As in 5. Drunk in—gets drink—displays bills, etc.

Scene 8—Close-up of boy et al. Boy and gang see roll—intent to rob, etc.

Scene 9—As in 5. Drunk staggers—rolls out—boy and gang follow.

Scene 10—As in 4. Drunk on—down alley—boy and gang after.

This scenario is, indeed, condensed. It is claimed

for it, however, that it is sufficient to give the editor, who is, of course, an expert, an understanding of the story and action.

Certainly the scenes tell the story, and it must be remembered that the scenario is for the editor alone and not for a reading public.

The condensation is helped by the fact that several of the scenes are cut backs, to wit, those that refer to previous scenes.

Furthermore, condensation prevents confusion, and there is no use, in fact it is a detriment, to put anything in a scene that cannot be readily understood. For time is precious in the photoplay, to the scenario editor and to the producer, alike.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE NECESSITY FOR STRONG PLOTS.

The old saying, "The play's the thing," must be changed in regard to "movies" to read "the plot's the thing."

For to get plots is the despair of the photoplay writer.

First of all, however, the "movie" writer must be a keen observer and a close student of human nature.

Life, as it comes to the ordinary mortal, is hum drum and an almost endless routine. To the majority of us, our surroundings are commonplace.

But it is from the seemingly commonplace that the greatest books and the greatest dramas have been taken. For there is always something of keen human interest in the people about us and in the surroundings which seem so monotonous to us.

Fortunately, a play requires the searching out, the development, the magnifying of an incident or incidents, peoples' characteristics and situations.

So, while to the casual, there may seem to be nothing worth while in the things about us, to the keen observer, which as, has been said, the "movie" writer must be, it is filled with incidents which can either be worked up in themselves, or which will suggest some idea that may be turned into a good plot.

So, Mr. Would-be-Movie-Writer, keep eyes wide open all the time.

Also, develop your imagination. Do not stop with what you see, but look beyond, behind—you may stumble upon a veritable gold-mine of a story.

Moreover, you can never tell when an idea will come to you that is worthy of being worked up.

For instance, one "movie" writer in describing how he came to evolve a certain plot, said:

"I was sitting in my room, looking out of the window when a blinding flash struck my eyes. Moving and looking out, I saw a boy going along the street swinging a dinner pail, upon which the sun shone—and it was this pail that threw the flash into my eyes.

"Instantly there came to my mind a colonial house in the country, somewhat back from the road, sur-



rounded by gardens. Evidently the home of people of wealth.

"A man is sitting in one of the windows. A flash strikes his eyes. Going to the table, he gets his binoculars and looks out. To his surprise he discovers a young woman tinkering with an automobile. The flash had come from the sun striking the mirror of the car.

"The rest of the story was easy—it was just a start I needed."

Constant reading of books, especially the old masters and foreign authors, is of the greatest assistance in developing ideas for plots, because a statement or word of one thing often suggests something else that will prove available.

Go to the theatres often, take in the "movies"—there are a thousand and one ideas that may give you the needed "starter," for it is the starting thought that is always the most difficult to get.

Another fertile source of the "movie" plots is the daily newspaper. Don't read the big stories with the big headlines. Search out the obscure paragraphs, the despatches from out of town places—there is always something worthwhile in the latter, especially, or they would not be printed.

Thus, may a novel way of doing something from

committing a murder to punishing a child may be picked up—and the insatiate cry of the scenario editor is “Give me something *new, unusual!*”

But if you succeed in finding one plot do not be satisfied. Keep at it. Store up all the material you possibly can. And kept just as much of it in your mind as you can.

Certain authors advise the use of systems—matter of fact card indexes—for keeping track of the plots that have come to them, jotting down brief incidents they have culled from newspapers, magazines, books, experiences of their own, or of their friends, even saving newspaper pictures and photographs. Others simply keep scrap books of their clippings.

The plan followed by the writers who use the card system is to make seven chief divisions, of which there can be any number, can be made at the writer's inclination. These chief divisions are:

1. The Heart of Mankind.
2. The Ambition of Mankind.
3. The Appetites and Passions of Mankind.
4. The Spiritual Side of Mankind.
5. The Mind and Will of Mankind.
6. Abnormal Mankind.
7. Humorous Mankind.

This writer in further carrying out the illustration

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of his system makes the following sub-divisions of the first chief division.

### **THE HEART OF MANKIND.**

- 1. Man.**
- 2. Woman.**
- 3. Love.**
- 4. Marriage.**
- 5. Home.**
- 6. Children.**
- 7. Family.**
- 8. Friendship.**
- 9. Separation.**
- 10. Reunion.**

Again he makes sub-divisions of 4.

### **MARRIAGE.**

- (a) Name.**
- (b) Wealth**
- (c) Social Position.**
- (d) Bigamy.**
- (e) Deception.**
- (f) Beauty.**
- (g) Blunder.**
- (h) Runaway**
- (i) Miscegenation.**
- (j) Morgantic.**
- (k) Eugenics.**

## HOW TO WRITE MOVING PICTURE PLAYS. 33

Surely in all these chief and sub-divisions there are the germs that can be worked into plots innumerable, aided by personal observation and reading the newspapers. And what has been done with one of the seven chief divisions can be done with all the others—and as many more as the “movie” writer may care to make.

## CHAPTER V.

### ADVICE TO BEGINNERS.

If you are just beginning to write "movie" plays, do not search for your plots in books or magazines. if you do, you will get your scenario back so quickly it will stun.

For the scenario editor, as has been said more than once, is a very keen individual and expert in his line, also he reads the magazines and new books.

Wherefore it takes but an instant for him to recognize the magazine story or book that has been adapted—for only skilled writers can take the work of a trained author and so remodel it that it will make an effective "movie."

Moreover, as a book depends upon the conversation and ideas of its characters, the great majority of books do not make good photoplays. For instance, while almost anything can be put into a "movie" picture, if the features of a book, its climaxes do not lend themselves to being acted out so that those who see the pictures can readily catch these features and climaxes, then the picture made from such a book will not be a success.

In every scene in every photoplay there must be a crisis—that is, a point of interest to which the scene leads up. And to be effective, the scene must stop at the crisis, not go beyond it or the spectator will not appreciate the climax.

Do you want to know what a "movie" crisis is? Here's an illustration.

A young fellow is in love with a rich woman older than himself. The mother does not approve. She, however, has never met the woman. The mother is called away. The woman decides she will take advantage of the mother's absence to kidnap the boy.

She drives to the boy's house in her limousine.

In the meantime, the boy's uncle, not knowing of the mother's absence, has dropped in to call.

When the woman arrives she finds the uncle with the boy.

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She and the uncle recognize each other as old sweethearts. The boy is surprised that she knows his uncle. How shall she explain her coming to the house in the mother's absence to the uncle?

There is the crisis. Stop there—then open another scene on the effect, the crisis, will be lost.

Conventional topics—and their name is legion—are to be avoided as the devil shuns holy water. And with conventional topics, conventional situations and actions should also be relegated to limbo.

No matter how good the acting, no matter how famous the stars, they cannot "get across" successfully a "movie" play that is conventional. And plots and situations that deal with familiar things run a close second to the conventional.

Recently inspections were made of several films with the object of searching out the familiar and the conventional, and the results are given, as reported by an authority.

The first "movie" was a Western tale with the hero from the East. He had his girl's picture in his watch. He wrote a note, his pal entered and saw the photograph of the girl he also had loved in the East. Then came the familiar old quarrel. A gun was snatched from the wall, the table was upset, the inevitable bag of gold dust was produced—and the winner of the

fight, and the girl, started East with the same old suit case.

Scarcely an action was different from countless other Western stories.

The spectators refused to enthuse, because everything they saw was familiar to them from having seen other Western "movies."

Another film was a society story. Leading woman at piano, window shade down and to be moved on signal—note is delivered to woman and "flashed" on screen: "Meet me third tree from corner at 10.30." Woman raises and lowers curtain in agreement—little child runs into room, puts out arms and asks to be taken into mother's lap. Woman realizes she must not leave home and baby. Same old story, same old "little child," same old conventional ending.

So get away from the plots, the situations, the climaxes with which the public is familiar.

But suppose your "movie" play has met with the approval of the scenario editor and been accepted.

Do you think it is handed to the director who is to produce it just as you have written it?

No, indeed!

The scenario editor gives it to the director, who has already had a word to say in its acceptance, and that worthy hands it in turn to a staff revisionist.



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And when the staff revisionist gets through with it, you might not be able to recognize it. He cuts it here, adds to it there, removes all trace of amateurishness and remodels it generally to meet with the locations that are accessible and the costumes that are in the wardrobe room.

All expensive scenes will be cut, especially interiors, and instead of seeing your heroine sweep down the old oak hall to meet her hero, she will probably meet him on a conventional "brown stone front" stoop.

So, if by chance, you see your "movie," though very different from the way you wrote it, on some screen, do not be disappointed because this pruning, padding and revamping happens to all scenarios, even of some of the most famous writers.

Some months ago, film producers went wild over serial and five and six-reel films—a one or two-reel story could not get the slightest chance.

But the public, after the first two installments, or an entire evening spent in watching one story, didn't take kindly to the offerings, and now the producers are swinging back again to the one and two-reel features.

Wherefore, if you are going to write for the

"movies," make your offerings run one or two reels—which means about ten minutes to a reel.

And don't try tragedy. There is the greatest demand for comedy—that is *real* comedy, not "slapstick," "knock 'em down and eat 'em."

## CHAPTER VI.

### DON'TS FOR THE PHOTO-PLAYWRIGHT.

It is the ambition of most "movie" writers to become connected permanently with the staff of some of the producing concerns.

Now while, as in all other professions, there is a constant demand for both men and women who can write successful scenarios, it is becoming more and more difficult to be taken on a staff for the reason that hundreds of scenarios are pouring in unsolicited, so why, reason the men in control of the purse strings, hire another regular man when we can pick and choose from the "scripts" sent us—and at much less cost.

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## HOW TO WRITE MOVING PICTURE PLAYS. 41

But the task is not hopeless and a few suggestions toward obtaining such an opportunity—for it is but an opportunity because you will not be retained a minute if you do not “produce”—may not be amiss.

Unless, however, you are convinced that you are qualified to become a staff member and have sufficient ability to hold the position—once you get it—under no conditions make application.

In the first place you will come in open competition with the other members of the staff. They will very quickly size you up, note your failings and then proceed to tell of them where they will do you most harm, for there is no place in the world where there is so much wire-pulling and so much back-biting and intrigue as in the staff-room of a moving picture concern.

But if you have sufficient confidence in your ability to be sure you can deliver the goods and have the callousness to withstand the intrigue, make your application.

Take with you any “movie” plays, stories and books you have had accepted or published.

You will probably be ushered into the presence of the general manager and the scenario editor, who will constitute themselves a board of investigation.

1

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First they will ask you if you have ever written any "movies" that have been accepted.

Name the ones and the concerns producing them.

Then they will ask if you have done any literary work, and it is the time for you to show or mention the stories and books you have written.

There will be countless other questions, among them whether or not you have ever had any newspaper experience, either as a reporter or editor, but the two given above are the main ones.

The greater your experience in any of these lines, the better your chances—if you are accepted by the "Board of Investigation" as a member of the staff.

Naturally a trained man will be given more opportunities than one who is not.

While your personality will count to a certain extent—and, even if you are, don't be a "grouch" while about the studio—it is your work, and that alone which will keep you connected with the pay roll.

Make as good an appearance as you can when presenting yourself for inspection. While the clothes may not make the man, they go a long way toward getting him a job.

If you have friends among the stockholders of the company, the officers, staff writers or actors, a good word from them will do you no harm—but don't ex-

pect influence to hold your job for you if you can't turn out the work. No one, whether intimate friend or relative, will keep paying out money any length of time to an incompetent or a misfit.

First, last and all the time, a staff writer must deliver the goods.

What has been said refers to the would-be staff writer who makes his application in person.

It is, of course, possible to do so by letter, but as personal interviews are always more satisfactory, if circumstances will permit, call rather than write.

And now, what of the qualifications a staff writer for photoplays must have?

He must have a good general knowledge of history past and present; he must be versed in things European as well as American; he must have a good idea of geography and be able to construct a practical "movie" play. Of course, extensive travel is a great assistance in supplying ideas.

Any staff writer may be called upon at any time to write a "movie" on a different theme, or with the scene laid in foreign lands—and he must be able to do it.

Consequently it is incumbent upon him to keep abreast of the times in all general topics.

Some "movie" concerns employ "readers" who han-

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de all the unsolicited scripts. Such a position is a great help toward becoming a staff member, and novices are advised to seek one, that they may gain as much experience as possible.

When the scripts are given direct to the staff writers for approval or disapproval, as is the case in most plants—for the editor does not see a script until it awaits his word for acceptance, having “passed” the reader—there is danger that the staff member will absorb the idea. In fact, no intelligent man who is constantly on the lookout for new situations and action, can fail so to do. Which is obviously unfair because the staff writer, from his greater experience, may be able to work the plot into a successful play—after the original has been returned to the writer.

But such are the “fortunes of war” and the dangers those who submit unsolicited “script” run.

Whether you become a staff member or not, you can do yourself a great service by carrying a notebook and jotting down plots, ideas, situations or even funny sayings you hear. And work this in conjunction with your card index.

As “movie” theatres are now located in practically all parts of the country, study the different films given. Note the character of plays produced by the various concerns and the methods of the directors.

As most films now carry the names of the producing director as well as the corporation, make notes of them, that you may address them personally, and send them only the class of plays they are bringing out.

Remember, every State has established a Board of Censors, whose duty it is to inspect every film offered for production in that State, and to cut out anything that will tend to injure the community.

For this reason, the following *Don'ts* may be of use to the "movie" writer:

Don't show the commission of a murder—leave it to be inferred.

Don't call for any lewd exhibitions or vulgar actions.

Don't bring the American flag into scorn.

Don't make a hero of a criminal—the fact that crime does not pay must be emphasized.

The road to fame as a "movie" writer is not paved with gold or roses—neither is it entirely one of thorns.

If you have the ideas, keep everlastingly at it. Every time you write a photoplay you gain in experience. And practice and perseverance will bring success in the field of writing moving picture plays, as in every other endeavor.

Moreover, don't be afraid to submit a scenario lest some one steal the plot—or at least "absorb" it.

Remember, "nothing ventured, nothing won."



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But when you do send out a scenario don't forget to enclose stamps.

The following is an excellent model of a sample scenario published by permission of the Lubin Manufacturing Co., of Philadelphia; Pa.:

### A BATTLE OF WEALTH. SYNOPSIS.

The author of this story illustrates the chain of circumstances by means of which a seemingly heartless society girl, reared in a narrow, money-getting environment by a money-mad father, and who causes a battle royal with equal honors, between two high financiers, becomes at last a loving, sympathetic wife.

Helen Winston has two wealthy lovers, Allen Roswell and Clayton Wade. Her preferences all lie in the direction of Wade, who is the more suave of the two, Roswell being rugged and blunt. Both propose to her, but to neither does she give a decisive answer. Her father, Hugh Winston, encourages both men and waits for the result of their wooing.

Roswell and Wade are not only rivals in love, but are business opponents as well, and, spurred on by the knowledge that to the richer will be given the hand of the fair Helen, they fight a battle in the stock mar-

ket. Roswell ruins Wade, who "goes down and out." He (Wade) then calls on Helen, but she coolly dismisses him.

Roswell marries Helen and proceeds to lavish upon her every luxury. Helen, nothing loathe, helps him along and spends money recklessly and without stint, but shows, in return, little affection for him. Then Wade gathers his few scattered resources together, and, in return, ruins Roswell.

Roswell returns home crushed, to tell his wife. She cannot realize it at first, but when the horrid truth finally flashes across her brain, she upbraids him and prepares to leave his home. She has never had "No" said to her in her life, has never been mastered, and in consequence, respects no man. Roswell, however, has always dominated every one with whom he came in contact, excepting his wife, and now proceeds to dominate her. He orders her to replace the clothing she has started to take down, and she then refuses. He then rings for her maid, and tells her maid to do it, which she does. Helen is afraid to quarrel before her maid and makes no further effort to leave at that time. She exhibits more respect for him.

The following day Wade calls upon Helen and begs her to elope with him. She finally consents, but will not allow him to take any liberties. He leaves, promis-

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ing to return in half an hour. Helen hastily packs a bag, and is ready when Wade returns. Just as they are about to leave, Roswell enters and confronts them. The two men stand glaring at each other. Roswell towers above Helen and gives her her choice between them, and stands with folded arms awaiting her decision. Helen hesitates, looking from one to the other. Then Roswell opens his arms to her and she slowly moves toward him and then, tossing her pride to the winds, she rushes into his arms and lovingly embraces him, pillows her head on his breast. Roswell, releasing one hand, points to the poor, and Wade slinks out of it, never to return.

### CAHRACTERS.

Helen Winston.....A Spoiled Society Girl  
Allen Roswell.....A Stock Gambler  
Clayton Wade .....The same  
Hugh Winston, Helen's Father..Whose God is Money  
Roswell's Butler  
Winston's Butler  
Roswell's Maid  
Guests, Stock Brokers, Clerks, Etc.

I

Roswell's private office.

Roswell discover—busy—clerks running in and out.  
Photo of Helen on his desk. Picks it up.

II

Wade's office.

The same.

III

RIVALS IN LOVE AS WELL AS BUSINESS.

Winston's ball room.

Ball in progress. Helen centre of attraction. Enter Roswell—is received cordially by Hugh Winston—"Delighted, I'm sure!" Roswell hastens to Helen's side. Enter Wade—received effusively by Hugh Winston—"Charmed to see you!" Wade hastens to Helen's side. The two men scowl at each other. Winston joins them—makes much of both. Wade leads Helen out.

IV

Conservatory.

Enter Helen and Wade—love scene. She shows she cares for him, but asks him to wait. They exit—Wade hopeful.

V

Same as III, ball room.

Enter Wade and Helen. Roswell shows anger. Goes to Helen—leads her aside. Proposes abruptly. Helen shows slight interest, but gives him same answer she gave Wade. He, eager and dissatisfied, exits abruptly. Winston goes to Helen, inquires about men. She shrugs her shoulders and laughs.

VI

FOR A WOMAN'S LOVE.

Same as I, Roswell's office.  
Stock market battle in progress.

VII

Same as II, Wade's office.  
Same.

VIII

Same as I, Roswell's office.  
Same.

IX

WADE IS RUINED.

Same as II, Wade's office.  
Same. "All over"—Wade ruined.

X

HELEN LEARNS OF WADE'S FAILURE.

Winston's library.

Helen discovered—enter Winston with newspaper—shows her. Tells her to “cut out” Wade. She agrees. Butler ushers in Wade. Winston receives him coldly—exits. Wade begs Helen for more time—promises to recoup. She dismisses him pleasantly, but firmly. He exits dejected. Enter Winston. She explains she has dismissed Wade. Winston pleased.

XI

ROSWELL THE SUCCESSFUL MAN.

Same as X, library.

Same as before. Enter Roswell. Winston gives him most cordial reception—exits. Roswell proposes and is accepted.

XII

MARRIED—MONEY LAVISHED UPON HER.

Roswell's drawing room.

Helen and Roswell discovered. She indifferent to him—spoiled and petulant. Roswell trying to be pleasant. Enter maid with her smelling salts. Enter butler—ushers in guests.

XIII

WADE RECOVERS FROM HIS FAILURE.

Same as II, Wade's offices.  
Everything and everybody busy.

XIV

ROSWELL AND WADE MEET IN ANOTHER  
BATTLE OF FINANCE.

Stock Exchange floor.  
Stock battle in progress—Roswell and Wade leading opposing forces.

XV

ROSWELL RUINED.

Same as XIV, Stock Exchange.  
Battle over—Roswell staggers away heart-broken.

XVI

"I HAVE LOST EVERYTHING."

Helen's boudoir.

Helen discovered on couch reading—maid adjusting pillows, etc. Enter Roswell, haggard and worn out—dismisses maid—tells Helen news. She dazed at first—finally comprehends—springs up. Scene. She rushes to dresser and begins taking things out of

drawers. "I am going to leave you." Roswell orders her to remain and to put clothing back. She refuses. He summons maid, who returns things to drawers. Helen, afraid of scene before maid, desists. Regards him with greater respect.

XVII

THE TEMPTER.

Same as XII, drawing room.

Butler ushers in Wade—gives card—butler exits—re-enters. Enter Helen—greetings. Wade begs her to elope. She hesitates. He pleads. She consents. He tries to embrace her—she stops him. He says he will return in half an hour—exits. She summons maid, orders her to pack some things.

XVIII

Same as I, Roswell's office.

Roswell discovered going over books and papers—rises—puts on hat and coat—exits.

XIX

"CHOOSE BETWEEN US."

Same as XII, drawing room.

Helen discovered walking nervously up and down. Butler ushers in Wade—picks up her bag—they start



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for door. Enter Roswell—comprehends situation—confronts Wade—gives Helen her choice between them. Folds arms—waits. Helen hesitates—looks from one to the other, as if comparing them. Roswell extends his arms—waits. Helen moves slowly towards him—then rushes to him and throws her arms about him. Roswell disengages hand and points to door. "Go." Exit Wade.

### WHERE TO SELL MANUSCRIPTS.

American Film Mfg. Co., Santa Barbara, Calif.  
Balboa Amusement Prod. Co., Long Beach, Calif.  
Biograph Company, 807 E. 175th St., New York City.  
Bosworth, Inc., Los Angeles, Calif.  
California M. P. C., San Rafael, Calif.  
Thomas A. Edison, Inc., 2826 Decatur Ave., New York City.  
Essanay Film Mfg. Co., Niles, Calif.  
Famous Players Film Co., 507 Fifth Ave., New York City.  
Fox Film Corporation, 130 W. 146th St., New York City.

Gaumont Company, 110 W. 140th St., New York City.

David Horsley Studio, Main and Washington, Los Angeles, Calif.

Kalem Company, 235 W. 23d St., New York City.

George Kliene, 805 E. 175th St., New York City.

Lasky Feature Play Co., 6284 Selma Ave., Hollywood, Calif.

Lubin Mfg. Co., 20th and Indiana Ave., Philadelphia, Pa.

Majestic-Reliance, 4500 Sunset Boulevard, Hollywood, Calif.

Metro Pictures Corporation, 1465 Broadway, New York City.

Oliver Morosco Photoplay Co., 201 N. Occidental Boulevard, Los Angeles, Calif.

Mutual Film Corporation, 71 W. 23d St., New York City.

Pallas Pictures, 220 W. 42d St., New York City.

Paramount Pictures Corporation, 110 W. 40th St., New York City.

Pathe Freres, Jersey City, N. J.

Pathe Exchange, 25 W. 45th St., New York City.

Selig Polyscope Co., Garland Building, Chicago, Ill.

Thanhouser Film Corporation, New Rochelle, N. Y.

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**Triangle Film Corporation, 4500 Sunset Boulevard,  
Hollywood, Calif.**

**Universal Film Mfg. Co., Universal City, Calif.**

**Vitagraph Company of America, East 15th and Lo-  
cust Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.**

**V—L—S—E, Inc., 1600 Broadway, New York City.**

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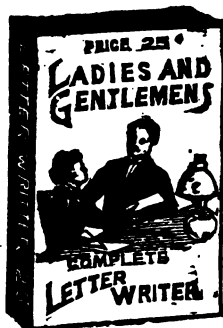
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